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ABSTRACT

An exploratory and descriptive study is reviewed which examined the identification and placement of 334 limited English proficient Hispanic students (grades 2-5) in learning disability programs. Ss' eligibility folders were examined to determine why they had been referred initially, how they were assessed, and to document the initial placement decision. District policies related to referral, assessment, and placement were also examined. The bulk of the report presents specific research questions, identifies data and statistical treatment, and summarizes results for the following topics: referral (most frequent reasons, grade and age level, retention history, socioeconimic background of referred students); comprehensive individual assessment (types of tests administered, language used to administer achievement and intelligence tests, scores on specific commonly used psychometric instruments); and placement (primary and secondary handicaps, makeup of referral and ARD (Admission, Review, and Dismissal) Committees. Recommendations for policy, practice, and research in pre-referral and referral, assessment, eligibility criteria, and placement committees conclude the report. (CL)

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PART I

CHARACTERISTICS OF LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT HISPANIC STUDENTS IN PROGRAMS FOR THE LEARNING DISABLED: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

REPORT SUMMARY

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Editors

This is Part I of a research study examining special education service delivery in three school districts for LEP Hispanic students who are placed in programs for the learning disabled, speech handicapped, and mentally retarded. (U.S. Department of Education, Contract No. 300-83-0272)

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PART 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT HISPANIC STUDENTS IN PROGRAMS FOR THE LEARNING DISABLED: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

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I

INTRODUCTION

The following is a summary of Part I of a larger research study which examines special education service delivery for limited English proficient (LEP) Hispanic students in programs for the learning disabled (LD), speech handicapped (SH), and mentally retarded (MR) in three school districts in Texas. Part I addresses the identification and placement of LEP Hispanic students in LD programs; Parts II and III address the identification and placement of LEP Hispanic students in MR and SH programs, respectively.

The objectives of Part I of this study were to: (a) identify the characteristics of Hispanic students referred, assessed, and placed in LD programs; (b) examine and analyze current policies and practices in the referral, assessment and placement of Hispanic students in the learning disabilities category; and (c) explore student, program and/or personnel variables that influence decisions related to placement of Hispanics in LD programs. This investigation was designed to provide a broad information data-base to help address some of the key issues involved in special education service delivery for handicapped limited English proficient Hispanic students. It is therefore important to note that the study is primarily exploratory and descriptive in nature and that it is intended to generate hypotheses, direct subsequent research efforts, and guide policy recommendations for the improvement of services and programs for students who qualify for both special education and special language programs.

Definitions

Learning Disabilities

The Texas Education Code 16.104 (c) (7), in the Texas Education Agency Policies and Administrative Procedures for the Education of Handicapped Students (1980) defines learning disabled students as:

> students (a) who demonstrate a significant discrepancy between academic achievement and intellectual abilities in one or more of the areas of oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, mathematics reasoning, or spelling; (b) for whom it is determined that the discrepancy is not primarily the result of visual handicap, hearing impairment, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage; and (c) for whom the inherent disability exists to a degree such that they cannot be adequately served in the regular classes of the public schools without the provision of special services. (p. 4)

Operationally defined, an LD child is one who exhibits a significant discrepancy between his or her ability (as measured by a standardized intelligence test) and actual academic performance (as measured by a standardized achievement test). Students whose discrepant scores may be the result of environmental, cultural, economic and/or other factors, are excluded.

Limited English Proficiency

The 1974 Amendment (P.L. 93-380) to The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) defines limited English proficient individuals (or those with limited English speaking ability) as those: "who (a) were not born in the United States or whose native language is other than English; and (b) . . . who come from environments where a language other than English is dominant . . . and, by reason thereof, have difficulty speaking, reading, and understanding instruction in the English language" (p. 566).

Native Language

Native language, when used with reference to an individual of limited English proficiency, is defined as "the language normally used by such individuals or, in the case of a child, the language normally used by the parents of the child" (p. 566).

II

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The sample for this study were 334 limited English proficient Hispanic students who were in programs for the learning disabled during the 1982-83 academic year. Students were randomly selected from grades 2-5 in three large urban school districts in Texas. Their eligibility folders were examined in an effort to determine why they had been referred initially, how they were assessed, and to document the initial placement decision, including the identified primary and/or secondary handicapping condition(s).

District Characteristics

To assure confidentiality, descriptive information about participating districts has been kept to a minimum. The three urban districts in south central Texas were selected because they had a large Hispanic student enrollment and well-established bilingual education and special education programs. The existence of these programs was critical given the focus on students who were both handicapped and limited English proficient.

Sample Selection

Rosters of Hispanic students enrolled in special education and a list of each district's limited English proficient students were obtained. These two lists were then cross-referenced to identify second, third, fourth, and fifth grade Hispanic students in special education classes who were also classified as LEP. A random selection of LEP LD students was made across schools within each district to preclude biasing the sample.

A sample of 40 students was to be obtained for each of the four grade levels. In those instances where the number of LEP LD students at a particular grade level was fewer than 40, all the available students were included in the sample. Table 1 presents the obtained numbers of LEP LD students selected from each of the three school districts.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection procedures involved four steps: (a) design of data collection forms, (b) training of data coders, (c) the data collection activity itself, and (d) analyses of district policies and practice.

Design of Data Collection Instruments. A data collection form was designed to capture initial eligibility information from student records. Copies of the various special education forms used by the districts were obtained and information specific to the research questions concerning assessment, referral, and placement of students in special education settings was identified. Due to differences among the forms used by the districts, three separate data collection instruments were designed to expedite data collection. However, all were designed to collect similar information related to student demography, referral, assessment, and placement. More than 1,500 discrete types of information were collected for each student. Data collection took place from March to July, 1984.

Training of Coders. A total of 24 individuals participated in data collection, including four full-time research assistants, nine University of Texas at Austin faculty members, and 11 master's and doctoral students in the University of Texas' graduate training program in Bilingual Special Education. The coders became familiar with the districts' special education forms and were provided two one-hour training sessions relative to data collection, professionalism and confidentiality. Coders then collected practice data from selected special education folders at the school sites. All trainees coded the same folders. Their responses were checked for accuracy and, when needed, further training and practice were provided. Inter-coder reliability ranged from 70% to 92.6%.

Table 1

Obtained Sample of LEP Learning Disabled Students

in Grades 2, 3, 4 and 5

During the 1982-1983 School Year

for District 1, District 2 and District 3

		School District		
Grade	Total	1	2	3
Grade 2	72	8	38	26
Grade 3	91	12	51	26
Grade 4	92	7	45	40
Grade 5	79	9	42	28
Total	334	36	176	122

Data Preparation and Analyses

Verified and corrected data were arranged into separate computer files for each school district as an initial step toward the construction of a "master" data file containing information for all the LEP LD students. For each of the district files, a corresponding control file was written, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner & Bent, 1975). Where necessary, values for certain variables were computed based on the mathematical transformation of the original variables (e.g., total amount of time assigned to special education programs). Selected variables were included in a "master" data file containing information from all three districts and analyses of data to answer the research questions were conducted.

District Policy Analyses

Analyses of district policies related to referral, assessment and placement constituted a second component of this research study. Federal and state policies and guidelines regulating the provision of special education services were obtained from the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) and from the State Department's Policies and Administrative Procedures for the Education of Handicapped Students (Texas Education Agency, 1979, 1980). Local district procedure manuals were the source of policy information for each district. District practices were extrapolated from information contained in student eligibility folders.

The specific focus of all analyses were referral, assessment and placement policy and practice related to each district's learning disabilities programs. Variables investigated include mandates governing services, participants in the process, and the types of data gathered and considered from referral to placement of students. An overriding concern was the extent to which the needs and unique characteristics of the limited English proficent students were addressed and considered.

Because of space limitations, specific descriptions of district policies and procedures have been omitted in this report. District policies reflected the general mandates of P.L. 94-142 and of State laws governing services to the handicapped. These policies included the broader procedural safeguards assuring nondiscrimination in referral, assessment, and placement, and the requirement that districts certify that students' problems were not the result of differences of language, culture, socioeconomic status, lifestyle, or to not having had opportunities to learn. However, there was little elaboration in district policy manuals as to how to implement these safeguards when the student being considered for possible special education placement was limited English proficient.

Methodology Limitations

The results reported in this document are based on an exploratory, field-oriented, and ex post facto research methodology. Therefore, the

limitations of descriptive methodology are also the limitations of this investigation. Kerlinger and Mason and Bramble (cited in Garcia, 1984), describe these limitations:

1. The range and number of complex variables which are often studied in non-laboratory settings can result in substantial problems dealing with the identification of cause-and-effect relationships among the variables.

2. Because appropriate sampling may be problematic, there are difficulties, hazards, and limitations associated with the generalization of the results. Moreover, in a study utilizing an ex post facto methodology, the research subjects have already been assigned to the program being investigated.

3. Since this type of research methodology relies on a type of open-ended nature of inquiry, there is sometimes a tendency to overlook certain types of evidence that could cause one to arrive at different interpretations or conclusions.

Finally, in research that deals with the collection of information from student folders, the results can be only as reliable and as valid as the information documented in these school district eligibility records. As Kerlinger warns,

> the records of many schools and school districts are not well kept. And in most cases no thought has been given to the research use of the records. Scores will be missing or inaccurately recorded. . . . Meanwhile, investigators must be constantly alert to possibilities of inaccuracies and the fact that school records are often not in adequate form for statistical treatment. (Cited in Garcia, 1984, p. 109)

Missing data may be regarded as indicating the absence of some pertinent special education action. However, drawing such a conclusion may be erroneous, as they may have occurred but simply have not been recorded.

III

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The central question posed in this study was: What are local practices related to referral, assessment, and placement of limited English proficient students in LD programs and how do these impact on the effectiveness of service delivery for these students? In the sections which follow, the specific research questions are given, the data and statistical treatment are identified, and the results are summarized along with their implications for policy and practice.

Referral

The referral process must screen away from special education those students whose problems may be related to linguistic, cultural or socioeconomic variables or to a lack of opportunity to learn. One aspect of this study, then, was to investigate why LEP students are referred to special education and to begin to examine the ability of educators to distinguish between individual differences and potentially handicapping conditions.

What are the most frequent reasons that LEP Hispanic students are referred to special education programs?

Data. Thirty-one reasons for referral were identified from students' records. These 31 reasons were then aggregated into 8 broader categories of related behaviors.

Analyses. Frequencies and percentages for the 31 referral categories and the 8 broader categories of related behaviors.

Results. Poor academic progress (n=132; 19.2%), poor progress in reading (n=115; 16.7%), high distractibility, poor attention (n=57; 8.3%), poor memory, retention (n=55; 8.0%) and poor progress in math (n=45; 6.6%) were the five most frequent reasons for referral. Twenty-six others ranged from 4.9% to 0.1%. When regrouped into broader categories of related behaviors, the following emerged as the most common reasons for referral (see dark bars in Figure 1): attention/behavior problems (n=221; 32%), poor academic progress in general (n=132; 19.2%), poor progress in reading (n=115; 16.7%), poor academic progress in one or more areas other than reading (n=91; 13.3%), problems related to language (n=76; 11%).

It was hypothesized that some "problem behaviors" stemmed from a lack of English proficiency (e.g. inattention, daydreaming) and that these behaviors might inaccurately be attributed to cognitive or intellectual deficits, thereby triggering a referral. Given this, attention/behavior problems which could also be behaviors characteristic of second language learners were re-grouped under the category of language problems. As can be seen by the lighter bars in Figure 1, the "language problems" category captured the most frequent reasons for referral upon re-analysis.

Conclusions. If problems in reading and language arts could also be attributed to limited English proficiency, then more than one-half (52%) of all reasons for referral of LEP Hispanic children to special education may be related to limited English proficiency rather than to a handicapping condition. Such a finding, if confirmed, suggests that significant numbers of LEP students may not need special education services.

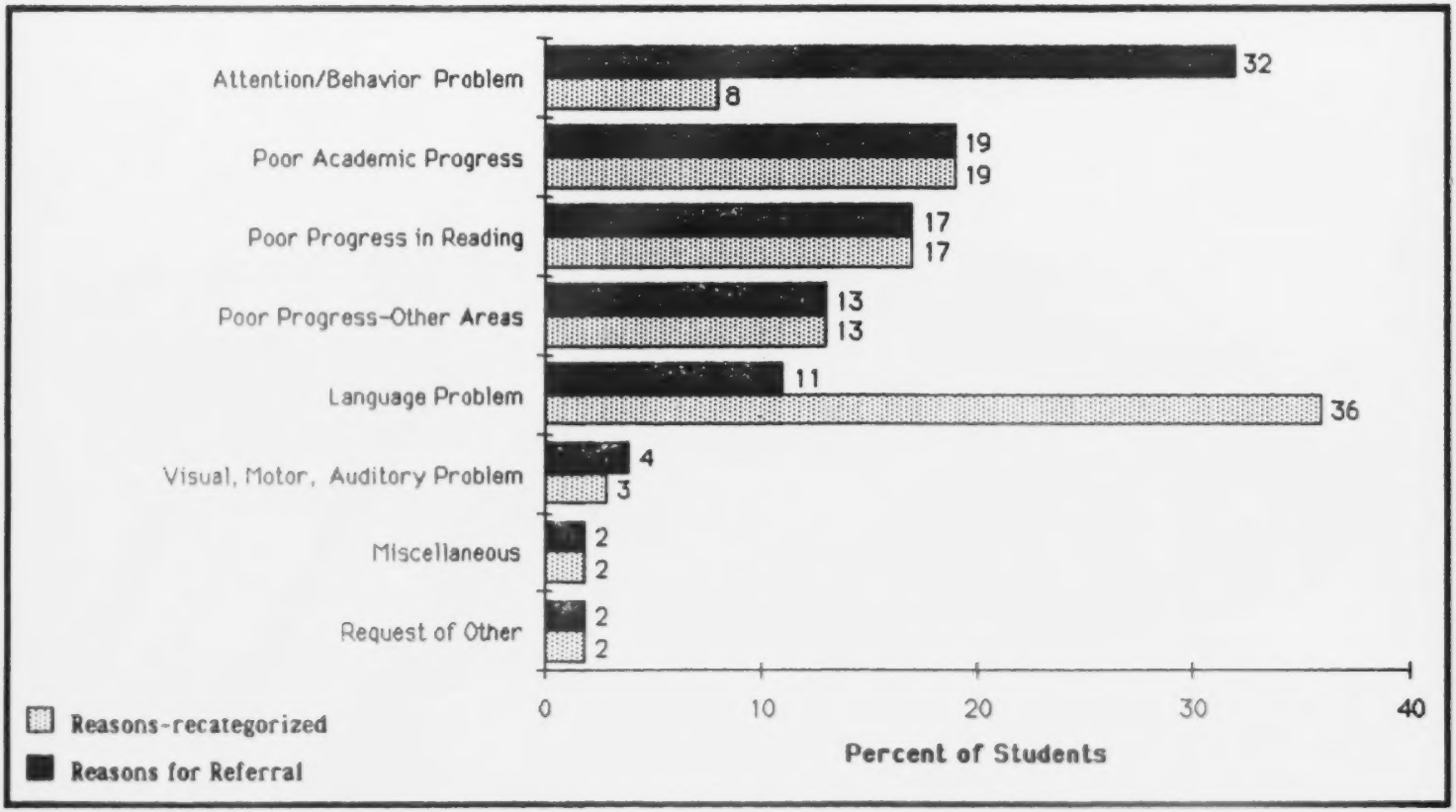

Figure 1. Reasons for the Referral of LEP LD Students.
Note. Percentages are rounded to the nearest figure.

To confirm the above conclusions, further investigations are needed which: (a) examine students' relative language proficiency in English and Spanish; (b) contrast achievement and skill levels in the native language and in English; (c) investigate the specific nature of difficulties in reading (e.g., the nature of reading comprehension, vocabulary problems, etc.); and (d) establish the relationship between limited English proficiency, cultural and other differences to referral for behavior/attention problems.

At what time (month) of the year do most referrals occur? At what grade level and age are LEP Hispanic students referred to special education?

Data. Data on month of referral were available for 312 (93.4%) students; data on grade level at referral were available for 289 (86.5%) students; data on age of referral were computed and available for 307 (91.9%) students. Data on age by grade at referral were available for 122 (36.5%) LEP students.

Analyses. Frequencies and percentages for: 12 month categories (January to December), 6 grade categories (pre-first to grade 5), and 15 age categories at the time of referral (4-6 to 12-0 in increments of 6 months); joint frequencies and percentages (age by grade at referral).

Results. Hispanic LEP students were referred most frequently at the beginning of each semester: January (14%), February (10%) and March (12%); September (14%), October (15%) and November (12%), with relatively larger numbers in the fall. The number of referrals of students was found to be highest in grade 2 (33.9%) with smaller numbers of students referred during grade 1 (26.6%), grade 3 (19.4%), grade 4 (17%), pre-first (2.8%) and grade 5 (.3%). Finally, the majority of students were referred between 7-0 and 8-6 years of age, which roughly corresponds to the appropriate age for second and third graders. A large number of students in the study sample were older than their normal grade level peers. For example, of all children between the ages of 8-0 to 8-6 years (appropriate age for grade 3) only 20% were in grade 3, with 27.3% in grade 2 and 11.4% in grade 1.

Conclusions. Data regarding grade level and age at which LEP Hispanic students were referred imply high retention rates and/or that entry into the school system for Hispanic children occurs at a later age than that of the majority of children. In order to further examine this possibility, data regarding students' retention history were analyzed.

What is the retention history of LEP Hispanic students referred to special education?

Data. Retention data were available for 234 (70.1%) students. Retention data by referral grade were available for 205 (61.4%) students. Retention data by age at referral were available for 220 (65.9%) subjects.

Analyses. Joint frequencies and percentages of cases according to: retention history (retained/not retained) by grade at referral (pre-first/1/2/3/4); retention history by age at referral (4-6 to 11-6 years, in increments of 6 months).

Results. Of the total 234 students for which data were available, 105 students (44.9%) had been retained. At least half the sample of students referred in grade 1 (55.3%) and half the grade 2 sample (50.0%) had been retained and were thus one year older than the rest of their grade-level cohorts. Retention history examined by age at referral indicated that the majority of students for whom retention was reported were in the age range 7-0 through 9-0 years.

Conclusions. Since the age range for retention was also the age range during which referrals were made more frequently, it is possible that retention prompts the referral. Although teachers did not cite retention per se, "poor academic performance in general", and "below grade level" were frequently given as the reasons for referral. The influence of retention on the referral of LEP Hispanic children to special education would need to be confirmed through further research.

What is the socioeconomic background of LEP Hispanic students referred for achievement difficulties and who are eventually placed in programs for the learning disabled?

Data. Information about the socioecomomic status of the student's family was extrapolated from the parents' occupation as recorded in eligibility folders. Occupation status was available in two districts for 99 fathers (29.6%) and 173 mothers (51.8%). Additional data on the family's welfare history was also available in one of these districts. Reporting of occupational status was often vague and/or inappropriate (e.g. the place of work would be reported instead of the position held by the parent).

Analyses. Frequencies and percentages for 6 occupation categories: unskilled worker, semi-skilled worker, skilled worker, small business, administrative, none reported.

Results. Approximately 20% of the families in one district were reported to be on welfare at the time of the student's referral. In the two districts for which data were available, the number of fathers with unskilled, semi-skilled or no jobs at the time of referral was substantial (63%). In addition, 88% of mothers were either homemakers or were unemployed.

Conclusion. The great majority of the LEP Hispanic students in the present study were of low socioeconomic background. This supports findings by Brown, Rosen, Hill, and Olivas (1980) that families below the poverty level are more likely to have children enrolled below grade level. There is a need for specific procedures to rule out the possibility that achievement difficulties are the result of socioeconomic status. It was not possible to determine from student records how this determination was made by referral or placement committees.

What is the family size of students who have been referred?

Data. The number of siblings in the families of Hispanic LEP children was identified from information on their referral forms. Number of siblings ranged from 0-12 (13 categories).

Analyses. Frequencies and percentages for the 13 categories.

Results. The majority of subjects (79%) belonged to families with 1-5 children (0-4 siblings).

Conclusions. These data are consistent with national demographic data which reports that the number of offspring tends to be higher among Hispanics (Brown et. al, 1980). These authors also found that being enrolled below grade level is related to family size: the greater the number of siblings, the greater the likelihood that children will experience achievement difficulties.

What is the language background both at home and at school of referred students?

Data. Data regarding students' primary language at home (n=317; 94.9%) and dominant language at school (n=232; 69.5%) were identified from the students' folders. Data on primary language at home by dominant language at school were available for 243 (72.7%) students. Note that primary language at home refers to the language most commonly spoken at home by family members; dominant langage at school refers to the language most frequently used by the student at school as judged by his/her teacher.

Analyses. Joint frequencies and percentages for: (a) 3 home language categories (Spanish/English/both English and Spanish) by district (1/2/3); (b) 5 school language categories (Spanish/English/both English and Spanish/codeswitchers/cannot determine) by school district (1/2/3); (c) non-parametric statistics: 3 x 5 chi-square test examining whether a systematic relationship exists between students' primary language at home and their dominant language at school.

Results. Sixty-seven and a half percent (67.5%) of the LEP Hispanic students spoke Spanish as the primary home language; 25.2% spoke English as the primary home language; and 7.3% spoke both Spanish and English at home.

English was identified as the dominant language at school for 48% of the students; 28% used Spanish as their dominant language; 25% used both English and Spanish. District-wide analyses revealed significant variations across the three districts. District 1 (and to a lesser extent, District 2) had a relatively large percentage of LEP students who were Spanish dominant in school (District 1: 80.6%; District 2: 77.4%). District 3 had the highest percentage (56.0%) of LEP students whose dominant language at school was English.

Chi-squared analysis (students' dominant language at school by primary home language) indicated that a considerable number of students who were English-dominant at school were from Spanish-dominant or bilingual homes. This was statistically significant ($X^2=46.77$; $p<.001$).

Conclusions. That approximately 70% of the students spoke Spanish as the primary home language was not surprising given that only students identified as limited English proficient were included in the sample. Of interest was that English was identified as their dominant language at school. In order to interpret the accuracy of this finding, it would be important to know the language proficiency of the raters who identified the student's home and school languages and, particularly with respect to school language, whether their judgment was based on a comparison of skills in both languages.

It is possible that the ratings of language dominance at school reflect (a) that these children are able to communicate well in English and that the dominance rating was based on the teacher's perception that the child had mastered the surface structures of English (Cummins, 1984); (b) that these children perceived that they were supposed to speak English at school; (c) that English was the child's preferred, but not necessarily dominant, language; or (d) that these students were English proficient in oral skills, but limited English proficient in terms of academics.

That so many students who were English dominant at school came from Spanish dominant or bilingual homes supports literature which suggests that language dominance depends upon the communication context or situation, the topic, and the interactors (Erickson & Omark, 1981). Therefore, it may be possible for a child to be Spanish dominant at home, but English dominant at school. Because dominance is not static or unitary, language assessments should be conducted in both languages.

As will be seen in the discussion of assessment findings, despite the high incidence of Spanish language use, this information received little attention by assessment personnel or by admission, review, or dismissal committees in selecting tests to be used in the comprehensive individual assessment, determining language of test administration, or interpreting results. Given this, it was not possible to rule out lack of English proficiency as the cause of achievement difficulties.

Comprehensive Individual Assessment

The comprehensive individual assessment is conducted to determine eligibility for special education services. The purpose of this evaluation is to determine the presence or absence of a physical, mental, or emotional disability which may contribute to a student's educational need; determine the presence or absence of a significant educational deficit requiring specialized educational interventions; and identify specific learning competencies. Assessment data is also used to rule out the possibility that students' problems are the result of factors such as linguistic or cultural differences, socioeconomic status, or to not having had opportunities to learn.

How many and what types of tests are administered during initial assessment of Hispanic LEP students to determine whether they are learning disabled?

Data. Eight possible test categories were identified from 327 (97.9%) students' records. Types of tests administered included: IQ, achievement, adaptive behavior, language proficiency, other speech/language, projective, perceptual/motor, and developmental or readiness tests. Only standardized tests were included. Assessments labeled "informal" and tests whose titles could not be located in reference books such as Mental Measurements Yearbook (Buros, 1978) were excluded. Therefore, the data reported may be an underestimate of the amount of testing conducted with children in the sample.

Analyses. Mean number of tests administered during initial assessment for the total sample and by district (1/2/3) for each of the above eight test categories, means for each test category for the full LEP sample and for each school district.

Results. The average number of tests administered at initial assessment was 5.0, but varied somewhat across the three school districts. The highest average number of tests given occurred for District 1 (6.6), while the lowest average number of tests administered was found for District 2 (4.4). District 3 used an average of 5.3 tests.

Achievement, IQ and perceptual/motor tests were the most frequently given, while adaptive behavior and developmental/readiness tests were administered less frequently. The number of language proficiency and projective tests administered appeared to be influenced by district practice. District 1 tested language proficiency more than the other two districts, while District 3 used projective measures more than Districts 1 and 2.

Conclusions. Overall, test batteries for this LEP sample appear to reflect the districts' definitions of learning disabilities in that testing centered mainly on IQ and achievement. Presumably, this testing format allows the identification of any significant discrepancies that may exist between achievement and intellectual potential. Except for District 1's use of a large number of language proficiency measures, there did not appear to be an emphasis on testing of language-related skills of LEP children.

Is current language proficiency data available at the time of the initial comprehensive assessment?

Data. Data concerning the recency of language testing were available for 289 (83.5%) LEP LD children in Districts 2 and 3. Data for District 1 were not usable because, although language scores had been recorded when available, the date of testing was missing from initial assessment reports. Data were recorded according to the following categories: (a) only current language testing reported (i.e., testing conducted as part of the student's current psychological assessment);

(b) only past testing reported (i.e., testing conducted prior to the date of the psychological assessment); (c) both current and past testing reported; (d) undated testing reported; and (e) no testing reported.

Analyses. Joint frequencies and percentages for each of the above categories related to recency of language testing by district (2/3).

Results. Current assessments were available for 23.6% of the sample, while 18.3% had no language dominance or proficiency information reported, and 46.7% had results of only a past assessment reported. For 11.4% of the subjects, the date of assessment was not reported. There were, however, large between-district differences in language assessment practices. For example, only current assessment scores were reported for 4.7% of the subjects in District 2, while for District 3, this percentage was 33.1%; only past testing was recorded for 62% of the students in District 2 and for 24.6% of the District 3 sample.

Conclusions. There is a general lack of current language assessment information in students' eligibility folders. This may be attributed to the lack of a specific requirement that special education assessment personnel conduct formal language dominance or proficiency assessments as part of the comprehensive individual assessment.

For what languages are dominance or proficiency scores reported?

Data. Language for which proficiency or dominance scores/levels were reported for both current (n=68; 23.6%) and past (n=156; 54.0%) testing were recorded for the following categories: (a) both an English and Spanish language score/level given; (b) only an English language score/level given; (c) only a Spanish language score/level given; (d) unscoreable or no numerical score given.

Analyses. Joint frequencies and percentages for language for which assessment scores are reported (both English and Spanish/only English/only Spanish) by recency of assessment (current/past) by district (2/3).

Results. For the majority of cases, language proficiency scores were reported for both Spanish and English: 70.6% for current assessments and 81.4% for past assessments. A similar pattern for both past and current assessments was observed for both districts. This finding should be interpreted cautiously due to the low number of students for which any current or past language scores were reported.

Conclusions. It is hypothesized that past language assessments were reported in nearly half of the psychological reports because the date of these assessments was too close to the date of the special education assessment to permit retesting. Therefore, the dates of past language assessments were examined to determine the time interval between initial assessment and past language testing.

What is the time interval between the date of past language assessments and the date of the comprehensive individual assessment?

Data. Full assessment dates (month, day, and year of assessment) were available for 62 (46.3%) of the 135 children for whom only past language proficiency or dominance assessments were reported. Only the month and year of assessment were reported for 40% of past assessments, and only the year of assessment was reported for 13.4%. Fourteen time-interval categories (expressed in 1 or less, 2-3, and then three-month intervals between the initial assessment and past language testing, the last category being over 36 months), were identified.

Analyses. Frequencies and percentages for the above 14 time-interval categories.

Results. Only 4.8% (3 of 62) of the past assessments were one month old or less, while 44.6% (27 of 62) were older than one year. The mean time interval between past language assessments and the initial comprehensive assessment was 14.2 months; the median time interval was 12.0 months.

Conclusions. The lack of current language assessments could not be explained by the presence of other recent testing with dates too close to the date of the special education assessment to permit retesting. These data suggest a need to examine the basis upon which assessment personnel determine the language of test administration. The lack of current language proficiency data also raises serious questions about district compliance with the mandate that students be tested in their primary or dominant language.

What language is used to administer intelligence and achievement tests?

Data. Data related to language of administration were examined for three tests: the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R), the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) and the Woodcock-Johnson (W-J) Psycho-educational Battery. Information about language of administration for each of these tests was coded into one of four categories: (a) adminstration in English only, (b) administration in Spanish only, (c) both languages used in administration, and (d) no information about language of administration.

Analyses. Joint frequencies and percentages for language of administration (English/Spanish/both English and Spanish/no information) by district (1/2/3).

Results. Both the amount of testing carried out in Spanish and the amount of information reported concerning language of administration varied greatly among the three districts examined. District 1 appeared to have no standard procedure for reporting language of administration of either intelligence or achievement testing; therefore, no information about language of administration could be found for any of the 29 LEP subjects from that district. District 2 reported some information about language of administration on the WISC-R for 76 of 166 (46%) subjects;

on the WRAT for 2 of 101 (2%) subjects; and on the Woodcock-Johnson for 3 of 70 (4%) subjects. District 3 reported information about language of administration on the WISC-R for 68 of 105 (65%) subjects; on the WRAT for 13 of 31 (42%) subjects; and on the Woodcock-Johnson for 28 of 71 (40%) subjects. For the two districts where information was available, the amount of intelligence testing conducted in Spanish differed. District 2 tested 2% (n=4) of the sample in Spanish only and conducted bilingual assessments with an additional 27% (n=45); District 3 tested 10% (n=11) of their sample in Spanish only and conducted bilingual assessments with an additional 33% (n=35).

Wechsler Intelligence Scale-Revised. Data regarding the language of administration were available for 300 subjects across the 3 school districts. Of these, only 32% (n=95) received any part of the WISC-R in Spanish: 5% (n=15) of the students were tested in Spanish only; and 27% (n=80) were tested in "both languages". Data from the "both languages" category should be considered with caution in that the assessment reports did not contain any explanation about what this testing procedure actually entailed. Data also are difficult to interpret because information about language of testing was missing for more than half of the tests examined. However, it is likely that, given a shortage of bilingual assessment personnel, these tests were administered in English.

Achievement Tests. Data regarding language of testing across the 3 school districts were available for 161 students who were administered the WRAT and 171 students who were administered the Woodcock-Johnson. Only 2% (n=3) of the LEP Hispanic students received any Spanish administration of the WRAT and only 9% (n=16) received any Spanish adminstration of the Woodcock-Johnson. The percentage of cases for which no information about language of administration was provided (WRAT 91% [n=146]; W-J 82% [n=140]) was higher than the percentage of missing information for WISC-R assessments (52% [n=156]). Within-district results parallel the across-district results reported above.

Conclusions. Most intellectual and achievement assessment of LEP children is conducted at least partially in English, although some of these children may have received instruction in Spanish in bilingual programs and although federal and state mandates require that testing be conducted in the child's dominant language unless it is clearly not feasible to do so. There is a need for districts to better document what language is used in assessment, and to document what procedures are followed when non-standard practices are employed. Districts seem to be reporting scores obtained through adaptations of items or procedures as valid indicators of intelligence or achievement. For example, scores based on norms (such as standard scores and grade equivalents) were reported for all types of administrations, including Spanish or bilingual assessments. Normed scores obtained from such administrations are not valid. There may be a need to insure that districts are using norm-referenced scores only when standardized procedures, particularly for tests which have only English norms, have been followed.

What relationship exists between the language of administration of the WISC-R and other indicators of language dominance?

Data. Of students tested with the WISC-R, data on language of administration (English/Spanish/bilingual) and primary home language (English/Spanish/both English and Spanish) were available for 136 (45.3%) students. Data concerning language of WISC-R administration (English/Spanish/bilingual) and dominant language at school (English/Spanish/both English and Spanish/cannot determine) were available for 115 (38.3%) students.

Analyses. An asymmetric lambda was computed for available data. The asymmetric lambda is a measure of association appropriate for nominal level data (such as language of testing), and measures the improvement in prediction of a dependent variable (for example, language of WISC-R adminstration) given an independent variable (for example, primary home language/dominant language at school).

Results. The asymmetric lambda for primary home language and language of WISC-R administration was equal to .02; that is, knowledge of a student's primary home language improved the prediction of language of WISC-R administration by only 2%. The asymmetric lambda for dominant language at school and language of WISC-R adminstration was equal to .27.

Conclusions. There is almost no relationship between primary home language and the language of WISC-R administration and only a moderate relationship between dominant language at school and language of test administration. While dominant language at school is a better predictor of language of WISC-R administration than is primary home language, neither of these fully determines the language of administration of the WISC-R. It appears that an English or a bilingual administration is carried out regardless of the results of language dominance indicators.

Of interest is that 26% of the children whose home language was Spanish and 4% of the children who were described as Spanish dominant at school were administered the WISC-R in English only. It is not possible to ascertain from the available data how the decision to test these children in English was made. Districts should better standardize and document this decisioning process.

What relationship exists between the language of administration of the Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery, the Wide Range Achievement Test, and other indicators of language dominance?

Data. Data for both primary home language and language of administration were available for only 31 (18.1%) of the students who were administered the Woodcock-Johnson, and for only 15 (9.3%) of the students who were administered the WRAT. Similarly, data about both dominant language at school and language of adminstration were available for only 28 (16.4%) of the students who were administered the Woodcock-Johnson and only 10 (6.2%) of the students who were administered the WRAT.

Analyses. Joint frequencies and percentages of students for whom both primary home language and language of administration of the W-J and WRAT were available, and for whom both dominant language at school and language of adminstration of the W-J and WRAT were available.

Results. Limited data regarding language of administration of the W-J and the WRAT, and primary home language/dominant language at school precluded any additional inferential statistics examining the extent to which these two variables were related.

Conclusions. There is a need for districts to more carefully document both the language of achievement testing and other language-related information as a part of LEP students' special education records. This is critical in that LEP students are likely to receive initial academic instruction in the native language. The significant discrepancy between intelligence and achievement, the operational definition of a learning disability, may be an artifact of achievement testing conducted in English only.

How do Hispanic LEP children score on the following commonly used psychometric instruments: (a) The Bender Visual Motor Gestalt Test, (b) the Wide Range Achievement Test, (c) the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-educational Battery and (d) the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised?

Bender Visual Motor Gestalt Test

The Bender is a test of fine motor coordination and perceptual-motor ability that takes about 10 minutes to administer. This paper-pencil test is nonverbal in nature, and requires the child to copy eight different geometric designs that are presented on separate cards. Common errors, according to the Koppitz Scoring System (Koppitz, 1964), can include distortions, substitution of circles for dots, perseverations and rotations of figures. As children get older they tend to make a smaller number of scoreable errors. The mean number of expected errors for 12 year old children is much less than would be the case for 6 year old children. Thus, as age increases, the error score should decrease.

Data. Koppitz Error Scores were available for 257 (76.9%) of the 334 subjects.

Analyses. Means and standard deviations for the Koppitz Error Scores for the LEP Hispanic sample by school district (1/2/3) and across grade levels (2/3/4/5).

Results. The following are the mean number of errors for the present sample by grade: 2=9.7; 3=7.8; 4=6.4; 5=5.6. As expected, as the LEP children in this sample advanced in grade, error scores decreased. Similar patterns were obtained across districts.

Conclusions. Scores of LEP LD students do not appear to differ from the norm to any substantial degree, thus indicating normal perceptual-motor functioning.

Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT)

The WRAT (Jastak & Jastak, 1978) has been used for many years as an individually administered standarized achievement test in public schools. The test, which includes assessment of reading, spelling, and mathematics skills, takes 30 to 45 minutes to administer in most cases.

Data. Grade equivalent scores on the WRAT were available for 117 (35%) students, and only in Districts 1 and 3. No data were available for District 2.

Analyses. Mean grade equivalent scores for the LEP Hispanic sample for the Reading, Spelling and Mathematics sections of the WRAT were computed for all grades combined. Standard deviations were not available for the WRAT scores.

Results. The average grade equivalent scores for the sample as measured by the WRAT were as follows: Reading: 1.4; Spelling: 1.6; and Mathematics: 2.1. Similar patterns within-district were observed.

Conclusions. Even when older students from grades 4 and 5 are included in the mean grade equivalent scores on the WRAT, scores for the LEP LD sample fell at the first grade level in reading and spelling, and were only slightly higher in mathematics. Because of high retention rates, these scores are even lower if age equivalent rather than grade equivalent scores are considered. These results suggest that these LEP children have a very low level of academic achievement, even on the mathematics section which is nonverbal and computational in nature.

Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-educational Battery

The Woodcock-Johnson (1977) is a norm-referenced test which contains 12 cognitive ability subtests, 7 achievement subtests, and 5 interest subtests. The Woodcock-Johnson tests were standardized to have a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15, thus being comparable to IQ scores on the WISC-R.

Data. Standard scores on the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-educational Battery were available for 315 (94.3%) students.

Analyses. Mean standard scores and standard deviations for the three W-J clusters (Reading, Mathematics and Written Language) by school district (1/2/3); numbers and percentages of LEP LD students who scored below scale on the W-J on the three clusters by district (1/2/3) by grade (2/3/4/5).

Results. The low academic achievement pattern that was obtained for LEP students on the WRAT also occurred on the achievement test clusters of the Woodcock-Johnson. The total mean standard scores for LEP LD students for all three districts were very low, falling between 1 and 2 standard deviations below the mean (Reading Cluster: 74.4; Mathematics Cluster: 79.1; Written Language Cluster: 74.6). One would expect that the frequency of low scores would decrease linearly at each successive

grade level; however, third graders obtained more of these low scores than second graders. These patterns were remarkably similar for students across the three school districts and the three clusters.

Almost one-half of all LEP LD students (45.6%, n=48 of 105) across the three school districts obtained standard scores on the reading cluster of 65 or below. The fact that only 15.5% (n=16 of 103) obtained scores this low on the math cluster suggests that the lack of English language proficiency may have negatively affected reading cluster scores.

Conclusions. One possible reason for low academic achievement patterns is that LEP students may have received native language instruction in basic skills in first and second grade. It is possible that they were still LEP in third grade when they were placed in special education. Unfortunately, it is not known whether the above explanation is valid without additional background information on the academic history of these children. Furthermore, the third grade data are from different children than the second grade data, since longitudinal information was not collected in this phase of the study.

Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R)

The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (Weschler, 1974) has been used for many years as the main measure of intellectual functioning of public school children in the United States. The WISC-R covers an age range from 6-0 to 16-11 years and contains 12 subtests. Six of the subtests form the Verbal Scale (Information, Similarities, Arithmetic, Vocabulary, Comprehension, and Digit Span) and the other six comprise the Performance Scale (Picture Completion, Picture Arrangement, Block Design, Object Assembly, Coding, and Mazes). The WISC-R provides Verbal, Performance, and Full Scale IQs. Each of the three IQs has a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15. The WISC-R was found to be the most common measure of IQ in the three school districts which comprised the HMRI sample.

Data. Full, Verbal and Performance Scale IQs on the WISC-R were available for 129 (38.6%) LEP Hispanic students. District 2 did not report IQ scores but did report subtest scaled scores. Subtest scaled scores on the WISC-R were available for 293 to 303 (87.7% - 90.7%) students, depending on the subtest.

Analyses. Means and standard deviations for the Full, Verbal and Performance Scale IQ scores were calculated for LEP Hispanic students by district (1/3). Means and standard deviations for subtest scaled scores were calculated for the three districts. Frequencies and percentages of students whose scores fell within each of nine 10-point range of score categories for the Verbal, Performance, and Full Scale IQ scores were calculated (see Table 3).

Results. The mean Full Scale IQ score for LEP students across districts was 84.2 (s.d.=11.9; n=129); the mean Verbal Scale score was 79.0 (s.d.=13.7; n=129); and the mean Performance IQ score was 92.5 (s.d.=11.7; n=132). This same pattern was observed in both Districts 1

and 3. Table 2 indicates that students across all districts had low subtest mean scores. Performance scale subtest scores within districts showed little variability (ranging from 8.2 to 10.7) and generally fell only slightly below the mean. The mean scaled scores of verbal subtests, however, showed greater variability (ranging from 4.1 to 8.9). Table 3 provides additional information which shows the low Verbal IQ scores obtained by LEP LD students and the restricted range of these scores. Although the mean of the WISC-R standardization sample is 100, with 50% of the norming sample scoring above this level, only 8.5% of LEP LD students obtained verbal scores at or above this level. Approximately 81% of these students had verbal IQ scores of 89 or below; 53% had verbal IQs below 80, and thus fell within the "borderline" or mentally deficient range.

Conclusions. While the mean WISC-R Full Scale IQ scores for LEP students fell approximately one standard deviation below the mean, a consistent discrepancy between the mean Verbal and Performance Scale IQ scores was evident, with the Verbal IQ score being 10-15 points lower than the Performance IQ score. The higher score on the Performance Scale is more likely to be a closer reflection of the true potential of Hispanic students, since verbal scores may be depressed by factors such as limited English proficiency. Moreover, if the low scores on the verbal section of an intelligence test can be attributed to limited English proficiency, then low scores on achievement tests can be similarly interpreted. When Hispanic students show significant discrepancies between intelligence and achievement, appraisal personnel must provide evidence that the learning problem exists in the native language.

How do the WISC-R score profiles of these Hispanic LEP children compare with Cummins' (1984) findings in his research of Canadian elementary school students enrolled in English as a second language (ESL) classes?

There has been very little research to date regarding how exceptional LEP students perform on the WISC-R. However, Cummins (1984) has recently reported WISC-R data for elementary students in Canada who were enrolled in English as a second language (ESL) classes. Although these students were different from the subjects in this investigation in that they were newly-arrived immigrants from non-Hispanic families, they were in the process of acquiring a second language and had been referred for testing and possible special education placement.

Data. WISC-R Full, Verbal and Performance Scale IQ scores (Districts 1 and 2 only, n=129 to 132) as well as sub-test scaled scores for the HMRI LEP sample (Districts 1, 2 and 3; n=293 to 303) were compared with those of Cummins' ESL sample (n=230 to 264 for the Scale IQ scores; n=152 to 266 for the subtest scaled scores).

Table 2

WISC-R Mean Subtest Scaled Scores for LEP LD Students

WISC-R Subtest	Total ($\bar{x}$)	District 1	District 2	District 3
Verbal Subtests				
Information				
$\bar{x}$	4.3	4.7	4.1	4.6
(s.d.)	(2.3)	(2.2)	(2.3)	(2.4)
(n)	(294)	(28)	(167)	(99)
Similarities				
$\bar{x}$	6.8	8.7	6.2	7.4
(s.d.)	(3.1)	(2.2)	(2.9)	(3.3)
(n)	(294)	(28)	(168)	(98)
Arithmetic				
$\bar{x}$	6.9	7.5	6.9	6.9
(s.d.)	(2.3)	(2.3)	(2.3)	(2.4)
(n)	(295)	(28)	(167)	(100)
Vocabulary				
$\bar{x}$	6.1	6.6	5.5	6.9
(s.d.)	(2.8)	(2.0)	(2.5)	(3.1)
(n)	(286)	(28)	(160)	(98)
Comprehension				
$\bar{x}$	6.9	8.9	6.4	7.3
(s.d.)	(2.9)	(2.9)	(2.7)	(3.1)
(n)	(293)	(28)	(167)	(98)
Performance Subtests				
Picture Completion				
$\bar{x}$	9.5	8.6	9.6	9.5
(s.d.)	(2.4)	(2.7)	(2.4)	(2.4)
(n)	(303)	(28)	(169)	(106)
Picture Arrangement				
$\bar{x}$	8.7	8.3	8.8	8.6
(s.d.)	(3.1)	(2.9)	(3.2)	(3.0)
(n)	(302)	(28)	(168)	(106)
Block Design				
$\bar{x}$	8.6	9.1	8.9	8.2
(s.d.)	(2.4)	(2.5)	(2.4)	(2.4)
(n)	(303)	(28)	(169)	(106)
Object Assembly				
$\bar{x}$	9.5	10.7	9.6	9.2
(s.d.)	(2.6)	(2.4)	(2.7)	(2.4)
(n)	(301)	(28)	(168)	(105)
Coding				
$\bar{x}$	9.1	9.4	9.1	8.8
(s.d.)	(3.1)	(3.1)	(3.2)	(3.0)
(n)	(298)	(28)	(168)	(102)

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages of LEP LD Students Whose WISC-R Full, Verbal and Performance Scale IQs Fall Within Nine 10-Point Range Categories

Range of Scores	Full Scale (n = 129)		Verbal Scale (n = 129)		Performance Scale (n = 132)	
	#	(%)	#	(%)	#	(%)
120 or over	1	(0.8)	2	(1.5)	2	(1.5)
110 - 119	3	(2.3)	0	(0.0)	7	(5.3)
100 - 109	12	(9.3)	9	(7.0)	28	(21.2)
90 - 99	19	(14.7)	14	(10.9)	50	(37.9)
80 - 89	54	(41.9)	36	(27.9)	29	(22.0)
70 - 79	30	(23.2)	38	(29.9)	13	(9.8)
60 - 69	8	(6.2)	21	(16.3)	2	(1.5)
50 - 59	2	(1.5)	7	(5.4)	1	(0.7)
40 - 49	0	(0.0)	2	(1.5)	0	(0.0)

Analyses. Means and standard deviations for the Full, Verbal and Performance IQ scores; means and standard deviations for the subtest scaled scores for the 5 Verbal sub-tests and 5 Performance subtests.

Results. Table 4 shows that the same Verbal-Performance Scale IQ discrepancy pattern found for the HMRI sample was present for Cummins' sample and that the IQ scores for the two samples were very similar. Table 5 allows comparison of WISC-R subtest scores for the HMRI sample with those of Cummins' sample. It is clear that the Performance Scale subtests showed little variability and generally fell only slightly below the mean. The mean scaled scores of Verbal Scale subtests, however, showed much greater variability. The mean scaled score for the Information subtest was approximately 2 standard deviations below the standardization sample mean, much lower than any of the other Verbal Scale subtests. If the normal curve distribution is considered, a score as low as 2 standard deviations below the mean should be expected to occur only about 2% of the time. The fact that the mean scaled score for the HMRI sample was very close to this level ($\bar{x}$=4.3) is surprising even if one assumes that this group of Hispanic students is truly LD and truly LEP. Table 5 reveals that the ESL students in Cummins' sample also scored surprisingly low on the Information subtest ($\bar{x}$=5.1). Rather than measuring intelligence, success on this subtest seems to be highly dependent upon cultural-specific information and a child's past experiences. This may also be true of the Vocabulary subtest, albeit to a lesser extent.

Figure 2 graphically shows that for each of the 10 WISC-R subtests, the pattern of scores present in Cummins' ESL sample is strikingly similar to the pattern that appears in the HMRI sample.

Conclusions. The same WISC-R Verbal-Performance Scale IQ discrepancy pattern that was present in the HMRI sample was also present in Cummins' (1984) sample. Similar IQ scores and subtest score patterns were also observed. Additional studies should be conducted to determine whether the patterns of scores occurring for these Hispanic LEP LD students occur with other samples and populations.

Placement

The Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) Committee is charged with reviewing the written findings of the comprehensive individual assessment and with determining whether students meet eligibility criteria for special education services. The committee determines the handicapping condition, selects the most appropriate placement, and specifies the amount of time the child will spend in special education, in regular education, and whether s/he will receive related services, such as speech therapy, physical or occupational therapy.

Table 4

Comparison Data: Patterns of WISC-R Mean IQ Scores for ESL Students Referred for Testing (Cummins, 1984) and for LEP LD Students from the HMRI Sample

	Cummins' ESL Sample	HMRI LEP LD
Full Scale IQ		
$\bar{x}$	81.9	84.2
(s.d.)	(14.6)	(11.9)
(n)	(230)	(129)
Verbal IQ		
$\bar{x}$	77.9	79.0
(s.d.)	(14.3)	(13.7)
(n)	(234)	(129)
Performance IQ		
$\bar{x}$	89.1	92.5
(s.d.)	(16.6)	(11.7)
(n)	(264)	(132)

Table 5

Comparison Data: Patterns of WISC-R Subtest Scaled Scores for ESL Students Referred for Testing (Cummins, 1984) and LEP LD Students from HMRI Sample

WISC-R Subtest	Cummins' ESL Students	HMRI LEP LD
Information		
$\bar{x}$	5.1	4.3
(s.d.)	(3.0)	(2.3)
(n)	(242)	(294)
Similarities		
$\bar{x}$	6.4	6.8
(s.d.)	(3.0)	(3.1)
(n)	(235)	(294)
Arithmetic		
$\bar{x}$	7.4	6.9
(s.d.)	(2.7)	(2.3)
(n)	(243)	(295)
Vocabulary		
$\bar{x}$	6.1	6.1
(s.d.)	(3.1)	(2.8)
(n)	(239)	(286)
Comprehension		
$\bar{x}$	6.7	6.9
(s.d.)	(2.9)	(2.9)
(n)	(173)	(293)
Picture Completion		
$\bar{x}$	8.7	9.5
(s.d.)	(2.9)	(2.4)
(n)	(262)	(303)
Picture Arrangement		
$\bar{x}$	8.0	8.7
(s.d.)	(3.7)	(3.1)
(n)	(263)	(302)
Block Design		
$\bar{x}$	8.0	8.6
(s.d.)	(3.1)	(2.4)
(n)	(266)	(303)
Object Assembly		
$\bar{x}$	8.4	9.5
(s.d.)	(3.2)	(2.6)
(n)	(152)	(301)
Coding		
$\bar{x}$	8.9	9.1
(s.d.)	(3.1)	(3.1)
(n)	(260)	(298)

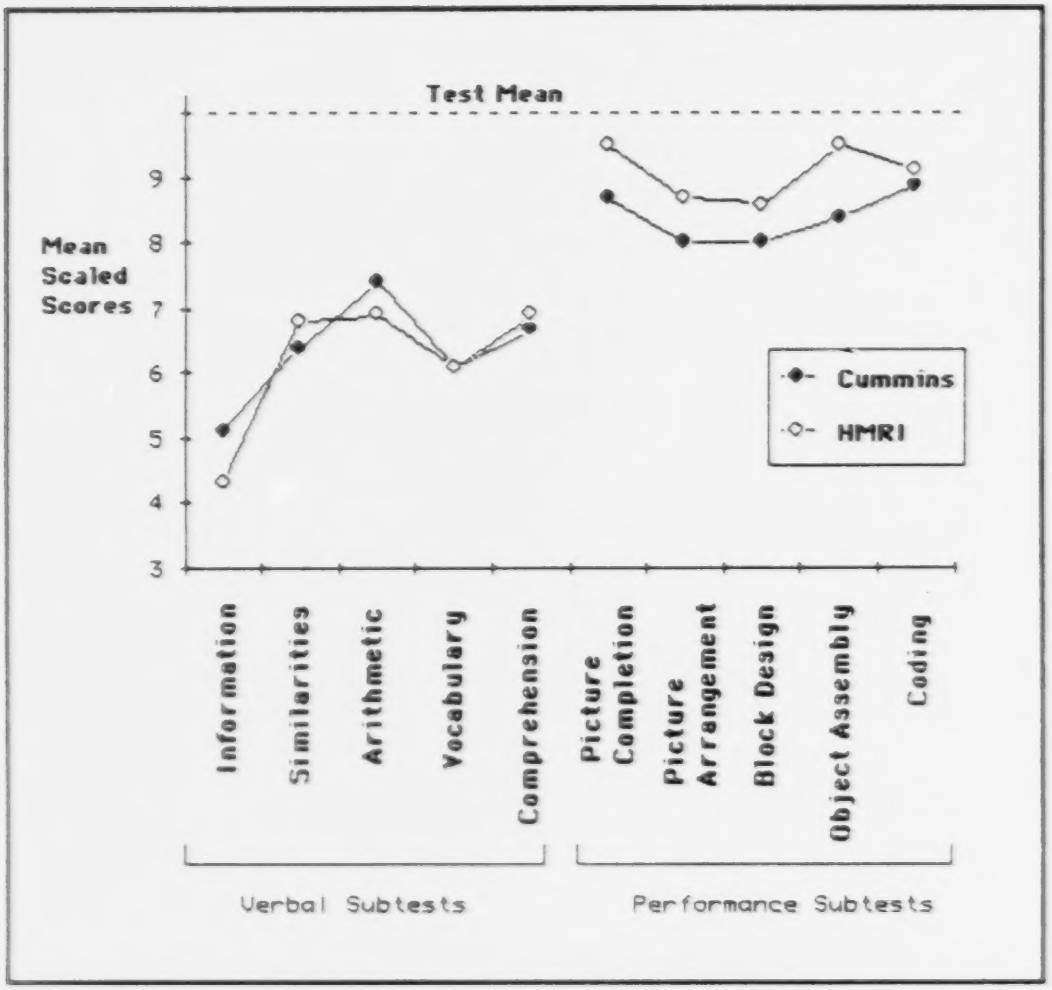

Figure 2. Comparison of Mean Scaled Subtest Scores of LEP LD (HMRI) and Canadian ESL (Cummins, 1984) Students on the WISC-R.

What are the primary and secondary handicapping conditions of LEP Hispanic students found to be eligible for special education services?

Data. Data were available for 334 subjects. Five response categories of primary and secondary handicapping conditions were identified: learning disabilities, speech/language handicaps, mental retardation, other, no information.

Analyses. Frequencies and percentages for each of the response categories above.

Results. The majority of students in the sample (n=278; 83.2%) were labeled LD at the initial ARD placement meeting. Approximately 9% (n=30) of the total sample had been placed in other programs (SH, MR or Other), but were classified as LD by the 1982-83 school year, the baseline year for this study. Approximately one third (n=108; 32.3%) of the LEP LD students also met eligibility criteria for speech therapy as a related service.

Conclusions. This finding suggests that teachers' reasons for referral predict ultimate program placement. Even those students who were referred for achievement difficulties but who were placed in other programs initially, eventually met criteria to be served as learning disabled students. Given this, training teachers to more accurately identify potential handicapping conditions and to distinguish differences from deficiencies among this population would help reduce the disproportionate representation of Hispanic students in programs for the learning disabled.

The high incidence of LD/SH classifications also supports a finding by Garcia (1984) that Hispanic learning disabled students are more likely to receive speech therapy as a related service than are non-Hispanic LD students. The high incidence of speech and language disorders raises questions about the nature of the communication disorder and whether demonstrated speech and language errors are indicative of real disorders or whether they are developmental errors common to second language acquirers. If the latter were true, then achievement difficulties, the basis of the LD diagnosis, could be related to a lack of English proficiency rather than to a learning disability. Research which compares the speech and language characteristics of students labeled LD, students labeled LD/SH, and normally achieving LEP students and which describes the nature of achievement gains of these groups over time, would help address this issue. Such investigations would also further understanding of the relationship between language proficiency and achievement.

What is the amount of time recommended for special education and related services for Hispanic LEP students placed in LD programs?

Data. Data regarding average time in special education (mean hours per week), as a function of grade at time of referral, were available for 192 (57.5%) students.

Analyses. Mean hours per week in special education by referral grade (pre-first/1/2/3/4/5) by school district (1/2/3).

Results. On the average, students were placed in special education classes for 8.6 hours per week. District 1 provided approximately 6.0 hours per week of special education instruction; District 2 provided 6.9 hours, and District 3 provided 11.2 hours. The amount of time recommended for speech therapy was missing for the majority of eligible subjects.

Conclusions. The amount of special education instruction provided suggests that the majority of students were mildly handicapped. LD student eligibility folders did not usually contain speech and language evaluations. It is possible that, rather than being missing, this information was reported in records maintained by district therapists. This finding does suggest a need to centralize all pertinent data related to student eligibility and service plans.

Who serves on referral committees which determine whether a LEP student should be recommended for a comprehensive individual assessment?

Data. Information about referral committee membership was only available for Districts 2 and 3 (n=271). Participation was analyzed according to one of eight categories: administrator, regular education teacher, counselor, special education teacher, educational liaison, speech therapist, parent, or other role/position.

Analyses. Frequencies and percentages for the above eight categories.

Results. In general, referral committees included those individuals recommended by district policy: an administrator (26%), regular education teacher (25%), the educational liaison (13%), and a counselor (17%). Other participants included special education teachers (15%), speech therapists (2%), other roles or positions (0.6%), and parents (0.5%). It is likely that regular education teachers were actually the educational liaison although they were not always identified as such on district forms. If this were true, participation of educational liaisons was 38%.

Conclusions. In both districts, participation of special language program (ESL or bilingual education) and other compensatory program personnel appeared to be limited. However, this may have been because participants were identified by role/position and not by program assignment. While participation of special program personnel is certainly imperative on placement committees which determine educational needs and develop individualized educational programs, involvement of these individuals in the referral process would enhance the ability of the committee to understand the influence of second language acquisition, culture, socioeconomic status, lifestyle, and other variables on student performance, and, consequently, to decrease the likelihood of misidentification of students as handicapped. While such membership at the referral level was not excluded, the lack of specific directives in

state policy left such participation to the discretion of each district and, consequently, to each school campus. While policy in all three districts listed support staff (e.g., Title I/Chapter 1, and bilingual education) as possible referral committee members "as needed", such participation should be required.

Who was involved on Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committees?

Data. Data were available for 334 LEP students in the three districts. Participation was analyzed according to 19 roles or positions (e.g., special education teacher, administrator, etc.) identified from required signature forms.

Analyses. Frequencies and percentages of roles/positions represented on the placement committee.

Results. The average number of participants on the ARD committees for LEP students in this sample was 6.5. The most frequent participants on these committees were those members required by law: administrative representative (87.7%), appraisal representative (85.6%), parent (76.3%), and instuctional representative (70.1%). It is likely the representation of instructional personnel was even higher but that such participation was reported by category of personnel (e.g. special education teachers [47.0%]; regular education teacher [19.8%]). There was a high level of involvement by personnel from speech and language programs; the speech therapist or the speech/language teacher was represented in 36.9% of the cases. This corresponds with the finding that approximately 1/3 of the students were designated as having a secondary speech or language disorder.

A surprising finding was the high level of involvement of parents in the ARD process. A frequent complaint of educators is that minority parents do not participate in school related activities and that they are unlikely to be involved in decisions affecting their children's education. According to the ARD records, the frequency of parental participation at initial ARD committees was 76.3%.

Conclusions. It is possible that a high rate of parental participation occurred because this was the initial placement meeting and that parents participated to support the school's attempts to improve their child's academic performance. It is also possible, however, that the parent's signature signified acceptance of the decision, not attendance at the ARD meeting. Only one district reported the date the parent's signature was obtained and whether the parent signed at the ARD meeting, at a school conference, or during a home visit. Furthermore, because the committee reports provided little insight into the nature of parental involvement, investigations should be conducted to determine whether parents are informed, effective participants in this process and whether schools maintain a high level of parental participation over time.

There was little evidence that personnel from other special programs (e.g. migrant education, Chapter 1 reading programs, etc.) were involved in these meetings. One of the problems in interpreting these data, however, is the lack of specificity about the positions held by ARD committee members. It was not possible to determine, for example, whether the representative of instruction was the regular education, special education, or bilingual education teacher. It was therefore difficult to ascertain the extent to which the participants were knowledgeable about the child, particularly in terms of linguistic, cultural, or other characteristics which influence achievement. Districts are cautioned, therefore, not only to carefully document ARD participation by position or title, but to also consider the type of expertise required for the committee to make informed decisions about the child's future.

What is the level of agreement among members of the ARD committees on eligibility of the LEP student for special education placement?

Data. Data were available on 334 LD cases and were obtained from district forms requiring members to indicate whether they agreed with the committee decision regarding eligibility and placement.

Analyses. Percentages of agreement or disagreement of committee members regarding student eligibility and placement.

Results. Despite the complexity of the cases of LEP students being considered for special education placement, there was almost unanimous agreement about placement and programs among ARD committee members. Of the 344 LD cases deliberated, there was complete agreement among the members in 97.6% of committee decisions.

Conclusions. This finding likely suggests that the signatures indicate simply that the participant agrees with the group decision reached, rather than indicating individual opinions about the case.

Summary and Conclusions

The process of identifying learning disabled limited English proficient students is a complex task which involves consideration of a broad range of variables, including students' language, culture, socioeconomic status, and other background characteristics. Information about these variables serves as a backdrop for determining which students should be referred, selecting appropriate evaluation procedures, interpreting assessment results, and distinguishing individual differences from handicapping conditions. The results of this study suggest a lack of understanding of how to identify learning disabilities among language minority students and how to distinguish behaviors which are indicative of a true handicapping condition rather than normal second language development. There was not sufficient data in eligibility folders to rule out the possibility the problem behaviors were, in fact, the result of differences associated wih linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic conditions or to not having had opportunities to learn.

The procedures used by school districts when LEP students are considered for special education placement are essentially the same as those used for majority students. These procedures, consequently, shed little light on the effects of language proficiency in English and Spanish on academic performance. This is not a criticism of district practice, but rather a reflection of the state of the art in bilingual special education. It is unrealistic to expect districts to develop model referral, assessment, and placement processes in the face of a limited knowledge base about the interaction of language proficiency and handicapping conditions. The findings reported here raise a series of interesting research questions which, if addessed, can significantly improve special education services for LEP students. Research directives, as well as preliminary recommendations aimed at improving policy and practice, are enumerated in the next section of this report.

IV

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Mandates aimed at assuring that handicapped language minority students receive a free, appropriate education are contained in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142), Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Amendments of 1973, state and federal laws governing special education, bilingual education, and related programs and services, and a body of litigation involving the rights of the handicapped and of minorities (e.g. Diana v. the State Board of Education, 1970; Lau v. Nichols, 1974, etc.). The dilemma for the education community is not a lack of legal precedents, but rather the absence of policy and data which can be used to develop procedures which: (a) help distinguish normal from handicapped students, (b) yield non-biased assessments, (c) assure due process in decision-making, and (d) result in individualized educational programs which help truly handicapped students achieve their maximum potential. The recommendations which follow are based on the findings of this investigation. Readers are directed to the full text of this study for a more complete discussion of these recommendations.

Prereferral and Referral

. Given the amount and the complexity of data which must be considered during the special education process, systems for facilitating record keeping should be developed to assure that student data are of high quality and that these data reflect the child's current level of functioning.

. Assessment of causes of achievement problems should include a systematic examination of the teaching and learning environment to eliminate these as the causes of student failure.

. Referral data should include a comprehensive description of the student's school history, as understanding the nature of prior instruction will be important in developing alternatives to improve achievement, selecting assessment procedures, and in developing educational plans if the student is eligible for special education services.

. A bilingual individual with expertise in the education of language minority students should participate in the referral process.

. Referrals should be initiated to special education only after regular education has documented that no appropriate mainstream placements are available for the child. Prereferral actions should be the responsibility, and under the jurisdiction, of regular education.

. Local policies should require parental participation at the prereferral and referral stages.

. Every referred student should have an advocate who can safeguard his/her rights. This educational liaison should be an individual who is objective, familiar with the student in a variety of contexts, including school and home, and knowledgeable about alternative regular education programs as well as procedures for the identification and placement of students in these programs.

. The educational liaison should not be the individual who made the referral.

Assessment

Native Language Assessment

. State and local education policy should require that every language minority child referred to special education receive a comprehensive language assessment in the native language and in English.

. The comprehensive language assessment should be a part of the prereferral process.

. Language assessment data used in deliberating a child's case should not be more than six months old.

. Rather than assessment of language dominance, a comprehensive assessment of the child's relative language proficiency is required.

. Placements of language minority students in programs for the learning disabled should not be allowed when the only language proficiency data available to special education personnel are those resulting from standardized instruments used to determine eligibility for special language programs (e.g., bilingual education or English as a second language) or from ratings by teachers or other school personnel.

. In addition to a formal language proficiency assessment (e.g. a state-approved instrument), every language minority student referred to special education should have a language assessment which includes natural communication samples and pragmatic criteria.

. Language assessments used as part of the special education assessment process should provide data to determine whether the student has the cognitive academic language proficiency (Cummins, 1982) necessary to master basic skills areas.

. Evaluations conducted for the purpose of determining special education eligibility must be done by someone who is fluent in the child's language and who is trained in assessment of linguistically and culturally different students.

. State departments of education should establish criteria to determine when it is "clearly not feasible" to test in the native language.

Evaluations of Other Abilities

. Practices used to assess intelligence and achievement of language minority students, including adaptations of standardized procedures, should be clearly documented in psychoeducational reports.

. To assure a nondiscriminatory assessment, trained bilingual, certified examiners should administer and interpret tests used to determine special education eligibility.

. School districts must show evidence that their appraisal personnel have been provided training specific to evaluation of language minority students before they can assess these students. State departments of education should develop minimum requirements for such training.

. Tests should be administered separately in both languages, with the child's dominant language being the first language used for each test administration.

. If local or regional norms are available, these should be used because they are likely to be more valid for these children than are national norms.

. Scores should never be reported as valid indicators of a child's functioning level if the procedures under which the test was administered or scored violate the original standardization.

. All psychoeducational reports should describe adaptations of accepted procedures and state that caution must be exercised in the interpretation of scores.

Eligibility Criteria

. State education agencies should develop special education eligibility criteria which are specific to language minority students.

. A limited English proficient student should not be considered handicapped unless evidence is presented that the handicapping condition exists in the primary language, not only in English.

. Students who show significant discrepancies between WISC-R scores and academic achievement should not be classified as LD unless testing provides evidence that a learning problem exists in the primary language.

. The higher score on the Performance Scale of the WISC-R is likely to be a closer reflection of a LEP student's true potential. The Full Scale IQ should not be used in determining eligibility of LEP students for LD programs.

Placement Committees

. Federal and state policy should require that at least one member of the placement committee be proficient in the child's native language.

. The Texas Education Agency has established policy that a representative of the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC), the committee which determines eligibility for special language programs, be included on the Admission, Review, or Dismissal Committee for any LEP student being considered for special education placement. State policy should require that the LPAC representative be a bilingual educator.

. Districts should identify the LPAC representative on required ARD Committee signature forms.

. The appraisal representative on placement committees should be the same individual who conducted the comprehensive assessment and should have the requisite knowledge and experience to adequately interpret assessment data on LEP students.

. The ARD Committee should include representatives from all other programs in which the child is served and the role or position of all participants should be clearly specified on required forms.

Recommendations for Research

. Ethnographic studies are needed to provide descriptive data bases of situation-specific variables affecting the instruction of language minority students in mainstream and in special education settings.

. Investigations of student characteristics, such as those related to language, culture, and socioeconomic status, and the relationship of these to academic achievement should continue.

. Given that classroom observations are required as part of the multifaceted assessment process when students are referred for possible placement in programs for the learning disabled, development of instruments to capture data about the effects of student characteristics on the teaching-learning process is critical.

. Research should facilitate the development of decisioning models which provide a framework for interpreting the complex interactions of student characteristics with the characteristics of teachers and learning environments.

. Strategies to assess learning environments and to demonstrate the effectiveness of curricula for LEP students and the degree to which the curricula are actually used would constitute an important aspect of research focused on exceptional language minorities.

. A taxonomy of instructional strategies which can be used to adapt or modify classroom instruction for underachieving students should be developed.

. Effective instructional practices which can be used by monolingual special educators should be identified as these personnel serve the majority of handicapped LEP students.

. Investigation of programs in which alternative instructional strategies are systematically implemented within the mainstream classroom for children experiencing academic failure may help reduce referral and special education placement rates.

. Of specific interest is the extent to which improvement in the quality of regular education or bilingual education instruction decreases LD placements and reduces disproportionate placement of language minority students in special education.

Assessment

. Studies should be conducted to determine specific eligibility criteria for LEP students, not only for the category of learning disabilities, but for other handicapping conditions as well.

. Studies related to assessment of language minority students must focus on levels of language proficiency rather than on student ethnicity.

. There continues to be a need to develop instruments or procedures to assess LEP students in their native language.

. The effectiveness of existing instruments, such as Spanish versions of intelligence and achievement tests, should be evaluated.

. The potential of instruments such as the Learning Potential Assessment Device (Feuerstein, 1979), which focuses on how children learn or solve problems rather than on static measures of intellectual potential, seems worthy of examination.

. Research efforts should be directed toward developing measures which accurately discriminate language differences from language disorders or learning disabilities.

. A related line of study would be procedures for measuring cognitive academic language proficiency and, consequently, a testing of the language model posited by Cummins (1982).

. The effects of using age norms rather than grade norms to obtain scores on standardized achievement tests and calculate discrepancies for LD eligibility should be investigated.

. The potential application of computer technology to assist in screening, evaluation, and identification of handicapped LEP students should be explored.

Referral and Placement Committees

. Criteria for distinguishing characteristics of learning disabled students from those of second language learners must be developed.

. The influence of program alternatives on placement decisions needs to be researched with a focus on the individual student and the program options available at the time of his/her initial placement meeting.

. Studies of the effects of the participation of various professionals on referral and ARD committees should be conducted to discover whether such participation affects recommendations for comprehensive assessments, placement rates, and consequently whether it results in different patterns of identification and placement.

Other Recommendations for Research

. This study should also be replicated in districts of varying size, location, and ethnic composition, and with other handicapping conditions to expand the data base on exceptional Hispanic students in Texas and across the nation and to improve the generalizability of findings.

. The study should be expanded to include investigation of the effects of past or current placement of LEP students in special education. Such research may serve to validate the hypothesis that academic failure is the result of lack of instruction in the native language and of premature exit from special language programs.

. Research must be conducted on the effects of special education services on achievement of learning disabled Hispanic students. It is hypothesized that special education services result in minimal gains for language minority students because specialized instruction is not effective unless it, like mainstream programming, is adapted to accommodate individual differences, including differences in English proficiency.

Summary

It is evident from the literature and the findings of this study that the developmental nature of the field of bilingual special education is a serious deterrent to effective, desired practices in the placement and instruction of LEP handicapped children. Federal, state, and local educational agencies, institutions of higher education, professional and related organizations should direct their efforts toward building a base of knowledge from which theory and effective practices may develop.

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